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SUBJECT: INDIA THINKS BIG BUT DOES LITTLE AT DISARMAMENT  
CONFERENCE

¶1. (SBU) Summary: A June 9-10 disarmament conference in New Delhi commemorated the 20th anniversary of the Rajiv Gandhi Action Plan on disarmament, but produced little in terms of concrete commitments by the Indian government. In his inauguration, the Prime Minister reaffirmed India's commitment to develop nuclear energy, and outlined "global and non-discriminatory" measures that it has proposed in a UN working paper. While participants used the conference as an opportunity to criticize the U.S. and Russian nuclear policies, they refrained from calling on India to take unilateral action. Confronted with an abundance of pie-in-the-sky idealism about a nuclear-free world, most of the attendees focused on the threat of nuclear terrorism and the usefulness of a "no first use" policy. End Summary.

Prime Minister Calls for Disarmament, but Nuclear Initiative Makes Headlines

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¶2. (SBU) In his inaugural address to the June 9-10 conference on "Towards a World Free of Nuclear Weapons," Prime Minister Manmohan Singh invoked the 1988 Rajiv Gandhi Action Plan and called for "nuclear disarmament that is global, universal and non-discriminatory in nature." He noted that India recently submitted a Working Paper on Nuclear Disarmament to the UN General Assembly, and highlighted several measures proposed in the paper, including "reduction of the salience of nuclear weapons in security doctrines" and "negotiation of a convention on the complete prohibition of the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons." He concluded by emphasizing that India planned to help craft "a consensus on disarmament and nonproliferation."

¶3. (SBU) Despite the overriding message advocating global disarmament, the press pointed to one paragraph that reiterated the Indian government's need for nuclear energy to meet rising energy demand. "We therefore wish to create an international environment in which nuclear technology is used not for destructive purposes but for helping us meet our national development goals and our energy security," the Prime Minister said. The Times of India translated this into its June 10 headline, "N-deal must for energy needs: Prime Minister," while the Hindustan Times titled its article, "Can't Limit Energy Options: PM."

Mukherjee, Ansari and Aiyar Repeat PM's Message

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¶4. (SBU) As further emphasis of the government's role in sponsoring the conference, External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee hosted the participants at a June 9 dinner, during

which he gave a speech that again invoked the 1988 Action Plan and reiterated the PM's points. Vice-President Hamid Ansari provided the valedictory speech June 10, stressed the call for disarmament. "The case for the possession of nuclear weapons needs to be assessed in strategic, legal, political, financial, developmental and environmental terms. Nuclear armament ends up being, in its implications, anti-poor and anti-development," he stated. He exhorted the global community to question the legitimacy of possessing nuclear weapons and agree on a way forward on disarmament.

15. (SBU) Panchayati Raj Minister Mani Shankar Aiyar recalled his stint as Rajiv Gandhi's aide when Gandhi proposed the Action Plan. Aiyar distinguished himself in the conference by openly disagreeing with the choice to conduct nuclear tests in 1998. "Did India's tests reduce its legitimacy to ask for global disarmament?" he asked. "We lost our shine, but not our right to ask for disarmament." Aiyar contended that India still acted as a "threshold" nuclear weapons state because of its "unambiguous" no first use policy and resistance to engaging in an arms race. He supported the Prime Minister's call to resurrect the Rajiv Gandhi Action Plan and proposed convening a group of states interested in reaching consensus on global disarmament.

Focus on Nuclear Terrorism

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16. (SBU) Amidst the lofty rhetoric about global disarmament and rampant criticism of the U.S. and Russian arsenals voiced by most international guest speakers, the Indian attendees concentrated on more concrete issues. The discussion

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following the first session, titled "Nuclear Weapons in the Contemporary World," narrowed on Jawarharlal Nehru University Professor Rajesh Rajagopalan's contention that terrorists have stayed away from nuclear weapons because using them would de-legitimize their cause. He advised governments to continue to make nuclear weapons taboo, but noted that legal disarmament measures, such as international treaties, would do little to dissuade terrorists. Instead, he suggested that governments take actions like de-mating weapons which would make it more difficult for terrorists to acquire a nuclear capability. Several participants, such as Reshmi Kazi from the Institute for Defense and Strategic Analysis (IDSA), countered that Al Qaeda's political agenda would not prevent the group from using nuclear weapons. Criticizing the focus on terrorists at a disarmament conference, M.R. Srinivasan, former Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, also noted that "nuclear weapons are the wrong weapons in anyone's hands, not just the wrong hands."

Is No First Use A Legitimate CBM?

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17. (SBU) The question-and-answer session on "Designing a Nuclear World" also narrowed to whether a No First Use (NFU) declaration could qualify as a confidence-building measure. Manpreet Sethi of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) advocated for countries to take No First Use pledges, which she saw as a "crucial step towards the eventual delegitimization of nuclear weapons since it would involve an assurance from every country that it would not be the first to introduce nuclear weapons into a conflict." However, Arundhati Ghose, former Indian Ambassador to the Conference on Disarmament, questioned the efficacy of NFU. She noted that a country that adopts NFU would have to retain the capability to survive and respond to a first strike, which would make its arsenal larger. While a universal NFU would have a clear deterrent effect, declaratory NFUs, such as India's, have little impact.

Nonproliferation In an Age of Nuclear Renaissance

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¶8. (SBU) George Perkovic of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace explored the prospects for nonproliferation at a time of unprecedented expansion in the demand for civilian nuclear power. The global diffusion of enrichment capacity necessary to fuel this demand runs counter to nonproliferation goals. States could be dissuaded from seeking domestic enrichment capabilities only if assured that a sufficient supply of nuclear material, but Perkovic suggested that many states -- discussion touched on Iran -- would not find such an arrangement at all credible unless fuel cycle capabilities were managed internationally rather than controlled by each state.

Comment: Disarmament Still Takes Second Place to Nuclear Deal  
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¶9. (SBU) Political contacts have indicated that several Congress Party politicians who lack enthusiasm for the nuclear initiative proposed this disarmament conference as a way of shifting the government's focus to a Nehruvian disarmament program which would realign the Congress with the Left. However, as shown by the media's focus on the PM's remarks on nuclear energy and lack of attention to the overriding message on a nuclear-free world, the organizers did not succeed. Moreover, the day after the conference ended, the Prime Minister dismissed the possibility of India signing a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) while pushing for the conclusion of the nuclear initiative. The conference, however, may have its use, by exposing many international critics of the nuclear deal (all of whom carefully skirted the issue during their presentations) to the gray area of India's call for global disarmament and maintenance of a nuclear weapons program.  
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